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ABSTRACT

Strategies for locating quality educational leaders and assessing candidates applying by an alternate route are presented in this pamphlet. Criteria for evaluating alternative credentials are identified, which include teaching and learning ability, leadership experience, education, personal attributes, and understanding of the social and institutional contexts. Recommended practices to ensure quality include peer review, adherence to procedure, and consistency of the alternate route with regular certification criteria. These procedures function to maintain professional standards and provide opportunities for candidates of exceptional merit from other fields. (LMI)

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# Alternative Certification For School Leaders

*National Policy Board*
*For Educational Administration*

## Finding School Leaders

The performance of American schools is one of the paramount topics of the day. While other institutions receive close public attention, the most continuous and careful scrutiny by the electorate is directed toward the schools. Is the American educational system providing the quality of learning needed for the 21st Century? Is the curriculum sound and is instruction effective? Are schools and school systems attracting talented teachers and leaders? These are central questions to Americans.

Some critics propose sweeping solutions; dismantle the system, authorize marketplace control of opportunity and quality, or increase accessibility by eliminating criteria for professional practice.

Questions about the performance of our educational system deserve careful attention. Answers, however, must be based on thoughtful analysis about effective practice. An observation of other fields is instructive. America has serious problems with its transportation, banking and justice systems. When a bridge or bank fails, the American public expects engineers or financial specialists to provide answers. If the court system is overloaded, we look for qualified judges. In these instances, persons with strong professional qualifications are considered essential to operate institutions effectively. Educational problems must be considered in similar perspective. We need professionals to solve them.

The public wants well qualified, knowledgeable specialists to lead society's

vital institutions. To assure sound quality control for those who serve schools as superintendents, principals and other school administrators, certification systems have been established in all the states. These systems define the requirements for education, training and experience necessary to qualify persons for leadership positions in elementary and secondary schools.

Where can these leaders best be found? Ordinarily, the most promising new leadership for schools will come from the large corps of experienced teachers who know schools and who graduate from a rigorous administrator preparation program. This talent pool is immense, some 2,500,000 educated individuals who understand students and know how to instruct them, develop their attitudes, and counsel their uncertainties.

Beyond this group, might there be capable persons who also deserve consideration for positions of school leadership? The answer is "yes." As is the case with other professions, including architecture and medicine, occasionally there are uniquely qualified persons who have earned the opportunity to practice school administration outside the regular route to professional credentials. Such persons must have substantially equivalent training and experience to qualify for practice.

In educational administration as in other professions, processes can be developed to yield judgments about a person's experience and demonstrated capabilities to determine approval for alternative certification. Such processes can be designed in the states to assure the public that only well-qualified persons administer the schools, while providing an opportunity by the alternative route for exceptional candidates to practice.

## Effective School Leadership

The central responsibility of superintendents, principals and other educational leaders is to shape the organizational culture of the schools in order to realize high performance by students and staff. This responsibility carries high stakes as the 21st Century approaches and success for all students becomes an imperative of society. Leaders for tomorrow's schools must be fully qualified to meet successfully the challenge of developing effective schools, for these leaders hold the keys to student performance.

To assure that the best persons available to lead schools actually receive the appointments requires a rigorous system of certification based on preparation and demonstrated practice. If an individual's training and experience offers exceptional qualifications and is the substantial equivalent of the regular specifications for state licensure as a superintendent, a principal, or other school administrator, then the individual should have access to a procedure within the state certification process for a review of these qualifications. The process must assure citizens that the usual standards for admission to practice are maintained, that criteria are not compromised, and that expediency does not erode quality. While persons exceptionally qualified should not be denied the opportunity to become credentialled, neither should persons of ordinary talent and background expect to be successful applicants.

Customarily in the professions, a procedure is established by which the judgment of peers and others is used to determine substantial equivalents. This review may be achieved by a panel or board designated by the existing state

authority. Such a panel or board would accept and act upon applications for licensure as a school administrator submitted under the alternative route. It would consider waiving the regular education and experience requirements for professional licensure as prescribed by the the state, providing the requirements are substantially met.

The criteria for substantial equivalency are essential to maintaining the quality of professional service and for protecting the public interest. They should be established by each state in relationship to the state's regular certification requirements. Evidence submitted by candidates applying for an alternative route should include the following:

## Guidelines for Alternative Credentials

1. *Teaching and Learning:* A demonstration of a thorough understanding of effective learning and the instructional processes which lead to it, including best practice and appropriate theory.

2. *Leadership Experience:* A scope and level of responsibility comparable to the position for which credentialling is sought; a record of successful and effective administrative behavior.

3. *Education:* An undergraduate degree from a regionally accredited institution; broad formal preparation at the post-baccalaureate level.

4. *Personal Attributes:* A proven capability in the area of human relations and decision making; confirmation of adequate oral and written expression; recognition of multicultural sensibilities.

5. *Social Context:* An understanding of the role of education in a democratic society; familiarity with current social and economic issues related to education; recognition of governmental and legal influences on schooling; perspective on the ways schools serve the larger society.

6. *Institutional Context:* An understanding of the procedures and processes by which school districts and schools develop policy and deliver programs to serve students, including the role of lay citizen governance and participation in schools; familiarity with the organizational culture and operations of schools; awareness of alternative structures.

## Assuring Quality

In each state, composition of the panel or board should include school administrators, professors of school administration, senior state officials, other educators of experience and reputation, and respected laymen. The principle of peer review is common among the professions and is essential to maintaining quality and standards for licensure.

Candidates for the alternative credential should follow explicit procedures, including presentation of a completed written application, a description of the exceptional qualifications that the candidate wishes to be considered, official college transcripts, documentation of other educational and leadership experience, and a professional resume.

While alternative certification procedures provide a route other than regular procedures, the alternative route must be consistent with and supportive of the criteria for the regular

credential. For example, states that require classroom teaching to qualify for a regular administrative credential should consider requiring some demonstrated instructional competence by candidates for alternative certification.

The procedures and conditions outlined here to determine qualifications for certification by an alternative route will sustain professional standards and job competency, while providing opportunity for candidates of exceptional merit to enter the field of educational administration.

Given the profound importance of schooling to individuals and to the general welfare, and recognizing the special legacy that accompanies those who provide for children and youth, the American public must be assured that professional competence is guaranteed by certification standards and procedures and by alternative certification standards and procedures. Leaders hold key roles in establishing and maintaining quality schools. The nature of their certification, therefore, is as important as the quality of schooling we expect them to produce for the nation's future.

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